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Disenfranchising the masses: voting rights for 'felons'

DI Editorial Board

Issue date: 10/9/08 **Section:** [Opinions](#)

In 2005, former Gov. Tom Vilsack passed Executive Order 42, providing Iowa's governor the power to grant the right to vote and hold public office to all ex-felons. It also allows the governor to restore voting rights and the right to hold public office to future ex-felons upon completion of all supervised release (parole and probation). To-date the executive branch has continued to automatically re-enfranchise ex-felons each month. In three years, no ex-felons have been denied their petitions to have their rights fully restored. Vilsack responded to criticism at the time, in a Quad City Times article, by defending the executive order on grounds that "when you give people the right to reconnect, the right to vote, to become fully engaged citizens, crime rates and recidivism are lower." The right to vote means more if you have lost it. Allowing ex-felons to regain their place as an active member of society should provide them with a strong incentive to avoid criminal behavior.

Executive Order 42 places Iowa among 17 other states which reinstate felon voting rights after all supervised release has been completed. Former Gov. Terry Branstad argued against Executive Order 42, in the same Quad City Times article, calling it a "mistake" and a "political move" which would "all of the sudden ... make 50,000 people eligible vote" - actually, closer to 98,000 ex-felons were given back their right to vote. According to ProCon.org, 5.39 percent of Iowa's population had been disenfranchised - the sixth-highest percentage in the United States - before Executive Order 42 passed; now it's closer to 1 percent and the 21st-lowest percentage in the country. While Iowa's laws are not as progressive as some criminal-disenfranchisement reforms, it's definitely a large step in the right direction. Voting is a right, not a privilege.

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Texas Hawkeye

posted 10/09/08 @ 9:06 AM CST

This is exactly the kind of editorial I would expect from the DI. Not every person who committed a felony is a "minority" or "lower class" person. There are plenty of convicted felons that commit white collar crimes such as embezzlement, wire and mail fraud, and other crimes that are committed by people that often have college educations and think they can't be caught. ([Continued...](#))

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Seadog

posted 10/09/08 @ 9:18 AM CST

A third OWI used to constitute a felony. SO not only did you lose your right to vote...but also, if I remember correctly the right to practice law if you were an attorney. ([Continued...](#))

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Scott

posted 10/09/08 @ 9:27 AM CST

I would love to see Alabama try to strip someone of their voting rights over burning an American flag. The ACLU would have their asses, and have an easy time of it too since existing legal precedent (Texas V Johnson) already resolved this issue in defense of expressive conduct. ([Continued...](#))

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UI Grad

posted 10/09/08 @ 2:19 PM CST

I think endorsing flag burning and endorsing the right to burn a flag are two different things.

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Kelly

posted 10/09/08 @ 3:21 PM CST

Why is the DI using Alabama as an example? It's not like Obama is going to carry the state. How about states like Colorado and Michigan where the Republican party is trying to nullify voting rights for people who lost their homes?

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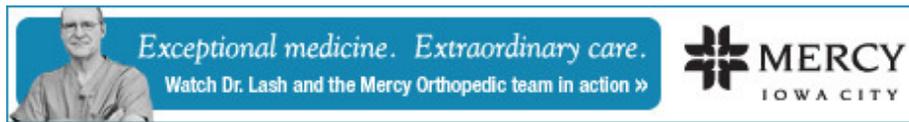


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